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ABSTRACT

An understanding of the present status of the teaching of communication in India is necessary to facilitate both the discipline's growth and the intercultural communication among scholars concerning communication education. Primary schools do not teach communication courses, and secondary schools include only a minimal amount of communication education, although both kinds of schools provide cocurricular and extracurricular communication activities. At the university level, there are no independent departments of communication or speech, but some communication topics are taught as part of other subjects or curricula, specifically agricultural extension or extension education journalism or mass communication, English and other Indian languages, and the teaching of languages. (JM)

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PRESENT STATUS OF THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE IN INDIA

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PRESENT STATUS OF THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE IN INDIA

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The main purpose of this paper is to describe briefly the present status of teaching of communication in India and to make some observations about the future prospects for the growth of the communication discipline in India.¹ An understanding of the present status of the communication discipline in India will facilitate the growth of the discipline in India, improve international communication between American and Indian scholars of communication, and might provide new opportunities for intercultural communication research and for cross-cultural validation of communication theories developed in the United States.

India, with a population of over 550 million, is the largest democracy in the world. The ethnic and linguistic diversity of its population is probably the most complex of any in the world. Since its political independence in 1947, the country has been going through important economic, political, educational, and social changes. In view of the size, democratic political structure, ethnic and linguistic diversity, and changes presently occurring, it is difficult to present here a thorough description of the present status of teaching of the communication discipline in India. Some of the observations made here might be oversimplified. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate communication scholars to undertake a more thorough and systematic study of the communication discipline in India.

Before discussing the present status of the teaching of communication, let me make a few statements about the educational system in India. The primary schools, secondary schools, and universities in India have undergone a process of gradual change in recent years. A uniform pattern of education is being adopted which consists of three stages: an eight-year primary school beginning at the age of six; three years of secondary school between the ages of 14 and 17; and a three-year

course of study in a university for a bachelor's degree. In some universities, students must complete one year of pre-university study, either as part of their secondary education or in a college, before enrolling in the three-year bachelor's degree program. The master's degree requires two years of study after a bachelor's degree.

There are three main types of universities in India:² (1) Affiliating type which merely prescribe courses of study, conduct examinations and award degrees and diplomas but do not undertake the task of teaching; (2) Affiliating and Teaching type which, in addition to carrying on functions of the affiliating type, offer teaching and research facilities; and (3) Residential and Teaching type which control all colleges under their jurisdiction and undertake teaching at all levels. Some of the residential universities are specialized institutions with one faculty in a field such as agriculture, engineering, technology, Sanskrit, or music.

The largest group is that of affiliating and teaching universities, consisting of relatively independent and autonomous colleges which offer undergraduate instruction for students in bachelor's degree programs or in preparation for the degree examinations given by their respective universities. Advanced study for graduate students is provided only by departments in the university or by special arrangement with qualified staff members in the affiliated colleges. The colleges (which are under either government or private supervision) must conform to the requirements of the universities in terms of facilities, curricula, and the qualifications of their staff members. An institute for advanced training and research can also affiliate with a university for the purpose of providing instruction or research opportunities for students in a postgraduate course of study in a particular field.

Now let us examine the present status of the teaching of communication at primary, secondary, and university levels.

At the primary and secondary levels, there is very little teaching of communication topics. Primary schools do not include any topics of communication in

their curriculum. Some secondary schools do teach topics of recitation, elocution, and oral interpretation (or loud reading) as a part of their language courses. However, there are various kinds of co-curricular and extra-curricular communication activities in both primary and secondary schools. Debate competitions, oratory contests, elocution contests, essay competitions, poetry recitation ("Antakchhari"), discussion sessions, and dramatics are common in both primary and secondary schools.³ There are intra-school and inter-school tournaments of these activities.

Generally, the teachers in charge of these communication activities do not have any formal training in speech or communication. In some cases, the teachers of English or teachers of other Indian languages, who might have received minimal training in speech or communication as a part of their degree in education, guide these activities. Usually, these communication activities are guided and coordinated by teachers who have no formal training in communication but have acquired some competence in these activities through practical experience.

Since primary and secondary level schools already recognize the importance of various communication activities, it might be relatively easier to convince the schools of education to include topics of communication in their curriculum so that their graduates will be able to guide and organize various kinds of communication activities in primary and secondary schools. Also, an effort should be made to incorporate more topics of communication in the secondary level curriculum.

At the university level, teaching of communication takes many forms. Although there are no independent departments of communication or speech in Indian universities and colleges, some communication topics are taught as a part of some other subjects. The four main subjects or curricula that include topics of communication are: (1) Agricultural extension or extension education, (2) Journalism or mass communication, (3) English and other Indian languages, and (4) Teaching of languages. Each of these four subject categories include certain topics of communication with

varying amounts of emphasis. Let us examine the kinds of communication topics that are taught under each of these subjects.

Agricultural Extension or Extension Education

This is a relatively new subject in India. It deals with the dissemination and utilization of useful knowledge or innovations. Agricultural extension deals with the diffusion of agricultural innovations. Home economics extension deals with the diffusion of home economics innovations. Most of the agricultural universities and agricultural colleges have independent departments of agricultural extension or extension education. Agricultural undergraduates are required to take course(s) in agricultural extension. Several universities offer graduate programs in agricultural extension.

The undergraduate course (or "paper") in agricultural extension usually includes such communication topics as models of communication process, group discussion, channels of communication, and diffusion of innovations. The graduate curriculum in agricultural extension usually includes many topics of communication: public speaking, persuasion, interpersonal communication, group discussion, organizational communication, agricultural journalism, broadcasting, and innovation-diffusion. Master's and doctoral students in agricultural extension undertake thesis research projects in various areas of communication.

The Indian Agricultural Research Institute (New Delhi) is actively involved in teaching and conducting research on communication topics as a part of its post-graduate programs (for M.S. and Ph.D.) in agricultural extension. The Institute was the leader in organizing a professional organization, the Indian Society of Extension Education, which publishes a quarterly journal, Indian Journal of Extension Education.

Many of the teachers of agricultural extension, especially those teaching graduate courses, have received some education in communication from American

universities. Teachers of agricultural extension usually are very interested in building academic linkages with communication scholars and professional associations in the United States. Such linkages will facilitate the professional growth of agricultural extension scholars of India and will enrich the academic field of communication through mutually rewarding professional relationships between American and Indian scholars. The departments of agricultural extension seem to have very good future prospects for developing undergraduate and graduate programs in communication for students planning to work in communication-related professions.

Journalism or Mass Communication

Several universities offer diploma or degree programs in journalism. For instance, the University of Calcutta, the Mysore University, the Nagpur University, and the Osmania University offer undergraduate degree programs in journalism. The University of Calcutta and the University of Mysore offer Master's programs in Journalism. Then, there are several universities and institutes that offer diploma courses in journalism. Besides journalism, there are various kinds of diploma programs offered by specialized institutes in other forms of mass communication such as film, radio-broadcasting, and television production (Sarkar, 1973). The Indian Institute of Mass Communication, established in 1965, offers several diploma courses in various aspects of mass communication. Besides training, the institute undertakes research and other scholarly projects in mass communication.

Because of the rapid expansion of mass media in India, there is a growing recognition for teaching more courses in journalism and other forms of mass communication. Also, there is a trend toward including interpersonal and mass communication theory topics in these course offerings. There seems to be a strong potential for the growth of the mass communication discipline in Indian universities in the near future, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

English and Other Indian Languages

Some topics of communication are taught by teachers of English and teachers of other Indian languages. Examples of topics usually taught by these teachers are recitation, elocution, and oral interpretation. These topics are taught as a part of language courses required of students of liberal arts who specialize in English or in one of the other Indian languages. These topics are usually not taught to students who specialize in subjects other than the languages.⁴ Several universities are beginning to recognize the need to incorporate more topics of communication in their English or language curricula.

The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (Hyderabad) and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (Mysore) have recently expressed an interest in incorporating some topics of speech communication in their curricular offerings. These institutes are very interested in building academic linkages with American universities.⁵

Teaching of Languages

Most colleges of education offer courses on teaching of languages. These courses usually include such topics of communication as recitation, elocution, written and oral composition, and oral interpretation. Some education schools have courses in technology of communication which include topics such as public speaking, group discussion, interpersonal communication, and mass communication.⁶ As stated earlier in this paper, teachers of languages are often expected to guide various kinds of communication activities in secondary schools. These teachers will do a more effective job of teaching communication topics and guiding communication activities if they receive a more thorough training in communication. There is a strong potential for incorporating communication topics in the curriculum of teachers of languages.

Let me summarize the main observations made in this paper. At the primary and secondary levels, there is very little formal teaching of communication, but there are various kinds of co-curricular and extra-curricular communication activities. At the university level, communication per se is not a subject of detailed study, but communication topics are taught under subject headings such as agricultural extension, journalism/mass communication, English/other Indian languages, and teaching of languages. These areas are beginning to recognize the need to incorporate more topics of communication in their curricula. Based on the observations made in this paper, it can be concluded that communication is a "developing" discipline in India and that it has a strong potential for further growth. The realization of that potential is a challenging task well worth the efforts of communication scholars.

NOTES

¹These observations are based on author's personal observations, a review of the pertinent literature, and a preliminary analysis of the data collected from over thirty universities and institutes in India.

²The number of universities rose from 47 in 1960 to 92 in 1970. The number of colleges rose from 1,542 in 1960-61 to 3,604 in 1970-71 (Lal, 1973).

³For a more thorough discussion of this point, see Oliver (1956).

⁴Several universities have independent departments of linguistics. Because of the great linguistic diversity in India, linguistics course offerings are becoming common at undergraduate and graduate levels. Linguistics departments have expressed some interest in teaching topics of communication.

⁵The All India Institute of Speech and Hearing (Mysore), another national level institute, which offers undergraduate and graduate programs in speech and hearing, is also interested in teaching courses in public speaking, human communication, broadcasting, and intercultural communication.

⁶Some colleges of education offer short diploma courses on topics such as elocution, public speaking and drama, but these are very rare (Oliver, 1956).

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